

PNCs: Million-dollar twins of collectibles

By Roger Boye

THE NORTHFIELD, Ohio, post office employees thought John Miles Baker was a little weird when they saw him in March, 1964.

Baker had glued three Kennedy half-dollars on three envelopes. He then put stamps on the envelopes and wanted the post office to cancel the stamps in such a way that the cancellation marks would run into each half-dollar.

"The postmaster talked with [postal officials in] Washington for 45 minutes, but they couldn't find a regulation forbidding what I wanted done," Baker said.

It was March 24, 1964, the day the Kennedy half-dollars were first circulated. At that time, Baker did not collect coins or stamps [once, he even had given away some Indian-head cents his grandfather gave him], but he wanted to save some of the new half-dollars because he had admired the late President John F. Kennedy.

"I thought it would be nice to be able to prove I got those half-dollars on the first day they were put into circulation," he added.

What Baker had made that day has become a new collectible called philatelic-numismatic [stamp-coin] combination [PNC for short]. Thousands of other PNCs have been made since 1964, and those collectibles have become a multimillion-dollar business involving several companies and governments.

The PNC reached a popularity plateau last

April 13, the day the new \$2 bill was put into circulation. Several thousand PNC enthusiasts were out in force that day, placing stamps on their \$2 bills and asking their local post office to cancel both the stamp and part of the bill. Those collectors then had a PNC and could prove they obtained their \$2 bill on the day it was first released.

"Lazy" PNC collectors didn't have to go to all that trouble. They could simply buy PNC \$2 bills from one of several companies offering them for sale.

Baker, considered the "father" of PNC collecting, found one such company, 99 Co., after he had moved to San Clemente, Cal., from Ohio. To date, the company [address: P.O. Box 99, San Clemente, Cal. 92672] has produced approximately 680 different PNCs, including United States and foreign issues.

For example, Baker, who has been to more than 40 countries, might be in Jordan the day a new coin is released. He would place the coin in a "tamperproof" envelope he designed and had patented [the coin is visible through a "window" in the envelope]. The envelope is then stamped and canceled, creating a PNC, and information about the coin and stamp is also included.

The 99 Co. recently offered for sale its version of a PNC \$2 bill. That was several weeks after some other companies had started selling them, but Baker said the delay doesn't matter.

"We endeavor to develop the most artistic

packages possible," Baker said. He added that his company attempts to coordinate the color and design of the envelope with the stamp and monetary item. It also publishes a newsletter which has a mailing list of 3,500. A 99 Co. "subscriber" receives the newsletter and three PNCs a month for \$20.

Some coin and stamp collectors believe that PNCs are a gimmick and that the collecting of them is ridiculous, at best. They are a "contrived collectible" and are "polluting" the two hobbies, those collectors complain.

But Baker disagrees. He said PNCs are a "far more beautiful and historic way to collect" than trying to fill a folder with coins or an album with stamps. In addition, he noted that PNCs can be autographed by the designers or other dignitaries.

Apparently, the hobby has caught on. Several thousand, if not several hundred thousand, people are collecting PNCs; and a national organization of PNC collectors was formed in 1967. The Franklin Mint, the nation's largest private mint, reportedly sold more than \$25 million worth of PNCs last year. Even the U.S. government and several foreign countries have produced PNCs.

Baker would like to see even more done. He wants the U.S. Mint to produce PNC sets regularly, have them postmarked in historic places, and sell them with proof and mint sets.

The more interest in PNCs, the higher the collector value for existing PNCs. For example,

Baker said, a Thailand PNC that sold for \$5 in 1966 has since brought \$325.

Or consider what happened to Baker's three Kennedy half-dollar PNCs. One of them was destroyed.

"The ink from the cancellation smeared on the half-dollar, so I ripped the half-dollar off the envelope and spent it in 1964," Baker said.

He sold the second one in a 1965 auction for \$100. Four years later, that PNC was sold by a new owner for \$18,000.

And Baker still has the third Kennedy half-dollar PNC. He said he would consider selling it for \$300,000.

THE U. S. MINT set a coin production record in 1975, but the Royal Canadian Mint produced 5 per cent fewer coins last year than in 1974.

The U. S. Mint made 14.38 billion coins in 1975, compared with the old record of about 12 billion in 1974. Of the 14.38 billion, about 13.5 billion coins were made for circulation in the U. S. [The U. S. Mint also produces coins for several other countries.]

By comparison, in 1875 the mint produced 64.5 million coins for U. S. circulation. Or, for another example, last year's total is more than double the 5.17 billion coins made for U. S. circulation just 10 years ago.

The Royal Canadian Mint's 1975 production total of 1.14 billion coins compares with the 1974 total of 1.20 billion.